



Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (**CATHI**). Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org.

Dear CATHI,

What are tremors and the symptoms associated with tremors?

What is tremor?

Tremor is an involuntary, rhythmic muscle contraction leading to shaking movements in one or more parts of the body. It is a common movement disorder that most often affects the hands but can also occur in the arms, head, vocal cords, torso, and legs. Tremor may be intermittent (occurring at separate times, with breaks) or constant. It can occur sporadically (on its own) or happen as a result of another disorder.

Tremor is most common among middle-aged and older adults, although it can occur at any age. The disorder generally affects men and women equally.

Tremor is not life threatening. However, it can be embarrassing and even disabling, making it difficult or even impossible to perform work and daily life tasks.

Generally, tremor is caused by a problem in the deep parts of the brain that control movements. Most types of tremor have no known cause, although there are some forms that appear to be inherited and run in families.

Tremor can occur on its own or be a symptom associated with many neurological disorders, including:

- multiple sclerosis
- stroke
- traumatic brain injury

- neurodegenerative diseases that affect parts of the brain (e.g., Parkinson's disease).

Some other known causes can include:

- the use of certain medicines (particular asthma medication, amphetamines, caffeine, corticosteroids, and drugs used for certain psychiatric and neurological disorders)
- alcohol abuse or withdrawal
- mercury poisoning
- overactive thyroid
- liver or kidney failure
- anxiety or panic

What are the symptoms of tremor?

Symptoms of tremor may include:

- a rhythmic shaking in the hands, arms, head, legs, or torso
- shaky voice
- difficulty writing or drawing
- problems holding and controlling utensils, such as a spoon.

Some tremor may be triggered by or become worse during times of stress or strong emotion, when an individual is physically exhausted, or when a person is in certain postures or makes certain movements.

How is tremor classified?

Tremor can be classified into two main categories:

Resting tremor occurs when the muscle is relaxed, such as when the hands are resting on the lap. With this disorder, a person's hands, arms, or legs may shake even when they are at rest. Often, the tremor only affects the hand or fingers. This type of tremor is often seen in people with Parkinson's disease and is called a "pillrolling" tremor because the circular finger and hand movements resemble rolling of small objects or pills in the hand.

Action tremor occurs with the voluntary movement of a muscle. Most types of tremor are considered action tremor. There are several sub-classifications of action tremor, many of which overlap.

- **Postural tremor** occurs when a person maintains a position against gravity, such as holding the arms outstretched.
- **Kinetic** tremor is associated with any voluntary movement, such as moving the wrists up and down or closing and opening the eyes.

- **Intention tremor** is produced with purposeful movement toward a target, such as lifting a finger to touch the nose. Typically, the tremor will become worse as an individual gets closer to their target.
- **Task-specific tremor** only appears when performing highly-skilled, goal-oriented tasks such as handwriting or speaking.
- **Isometric tremor** occurs during a voluntary muscle contraction that is not accompanied by any movement such as holding a heavy book or a dumbbell in the same position.

The information in this article was adapted from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Strokes, Tremor Fact Sheet, 2017.

****If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available to you please email caregiver2@senior-resources-quilford.org***

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford's SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program
Completing the Care



Community Partner